MLSC 617
Creative Nonfiction
Course Procedures and Syllabus
Winter 2015

Meeting dates, time, and location: January 7 – March 18,
Wednesdays, 6:15 – 9:30 PM – Location ACC 300

Instructor:	Deborah J. Barrett, Ph.D., Professor of the Practice of Writing and Communication
Phone:	**(713) 397-6567 (cell for voice or text messages)**
E-mail:	**barrett@rice.edu (best way to reach me).** If you do not hear back from me in 24 hours, then please send me a text or leave a message on my cell phone, since it means your e-mail did not get to me for some reason (often pushed into SPAM, which I only check weekly).
Office hours:	By appointment through e-mail.

Introduction

Creative nonfiction can take many different forms, such as expository writing, personal essay, narrative nonfiction, literary journalism, memoir, nature and science writing, travel and food writing, historical narrative, biographical narrative, academic/cultural criticism, and personal profile. This course is designed to help students read and write creative nonfiction with a focus on the voice, structure, and technique found in mostly contemporary creative nonfiction.

The course will include critical reading and discussion of modern and contemporary essays specifically selected to demonstrate the breadth of the genre coupled with writing exercises and the respectful criticism of peer work in a workshop format. Throughout the semester, students will turn in short writing exercises and essays, culminating in a portfolio of their work as a final project.

Course Objectives

The course objectives are to help students learn to do the following:

- Read and analyze essays from the rich and diverse creative nonfiction genre
- Recognize the writing techniques commonly used in creative nonfiction and practice these techniques in their own writing
- Express themselves gracefully and address form and style in their writing, including structure, flow, diction, and usage
- Find or refine their own voices and space within the creative nonfiction discipline, exploring opportunities for further development of their creative writing abilities and for publishing

Texts and Reading Materials

Primary Texts

Bradway, Becky, and Doug Hesse. *Creating Nonfiction: A Guide and Anthology*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. Cited in Daily Syllabus as **Bradway & Hesse**.

Bacon, Nora. *The Well-Crafted Sentence (A Writer's Guide to Style)*, 2nd edition. Boston: Bedford; St. Martin's, 2013. Cited in syllabus as **Bacon**.

Forché, Carolyn, and Philip Gerard. *Writing Creative Nonfiction*. Story Press; Associated Writing Programs, 2001. Cited in syllabus as **Forché and Gerard**.

Gutkind, Lee, ed. *Keep it Real: Everything You Need to Know About Researching and Writing Creative Nonfiction*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. Cited in syllabus as Gutkind.

I will post the following additional essays and excerpts in the Resources section of OWL-Space.

Additional Readings

Bryson, Bill. Excerpts from *A Walk in the Woods*. New York: Broadway Books, 1998.

Capote, Truman. "New Orleans" & "New York." From *Truman Capote Reader*. New York: Random House, 1987.

Kupperman, Kim Dana. "Two Teacups," "I Just Lately Started Buying Wings," and "See Me Slant: Poetry Considers Her Mother," Essays selected from *I just Lately Started Buying Wings: Missives from the Other Side of Silence*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2010.

Levine, Betty. "Critique Your way to Better Writing." *Writer's Digest* 92.1 (2012): 44-47.

Oates, Joyce Carol. "Against Nature."

O'Brien, Tim. "Beginning" and "Escape." Chapters excerpted from *If I Did in a Combat Zone Box Me up and Ship Me Home*. New York: Broadway Books, 1975.

Solnitt, Rebecca. "Two Arrowheads." From her book *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. New York: Penguin, 2005.

White, E.B. "Here is New York." *Essays of E. B. White.* Harper Perennial, 1977.

Woolf, Virginia. "A Sketch of the Past" (Excerpts). *Moments of Being: A Collection of Autobiographical Writing.* 2nd edition. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. San Diego: Harcourt, 1985.

Craft Essays and Information (Under Supplementary in Resources)

Birkerts, Sven. Excerpts from *Art of Time in Memoir: Then, Again.*

Dyer, Joyce. "Let Me Think About That: The Memoirist as Ruminant." *The Writer's Chronicle.* September 2013.

Gass, William. "The Art of Self." *Harper's Magazine* May 1994.

Hampl, Patricia. "Memory and Imagination." From *I Could Tell You Stories.*

"How to Submit Anything (& Everything!): Your Step-by-Step Guide to Getting Published." *Writer's Digest* 92.1 (2012): 22-39.

Kephart, Beth. Excerpts from *Handling the Truth: On the Writing of Memoir*. New York: Penguin, Gotham Books, 2013.

Kramer, Jane. "Me, Myself, and I: What Made Michel de Montaigne the First Modern Man? *The New Yorker* 7 Sept. 2009.

Medelsohn, Daniel. "But Enough About Me: What Does the Popularity of Memoirs Tell Us About Ourselves?" *The New Yorker* 25 Jan. 2010.

Orwell, George. "Politics and the English Language."

Schlack, Julie Wittes. "Mindfulness and Memoir." *The Writer's Chronicle*, December 2013.

Evaluation Principles and Assignment Guidelines

I will judge the merits of your work in relation to your peers but also against a standard of excellence expected of students in a master's degree-level program at Rice University. I will follow these general grading principles:

1. I will evaluate each assignment using the criteria below:
   a. Effective structure, flow
      - Gets reader's attention (title, introduction, first few paragraphs)
      - Maintains momentum
      - Ends strongly
   b. Clear in writing and story
   c. Verisimilitude (sense of truth)
   d. Originality and creativity
   e. Adequacy of research methods when appropriate
   f. Effectiveness of style and tone and suitability for the topic
   g. Correct use of, or at least justifiable use of, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
   h. Formatting and appearance (including careful proofreading for typos, etc.)
2. My intention is to work with you to develop your creative writing abilities. If at any time, you do not understand the evaluation of your work or have any other questions, please come see me.
3. I will use the following scale when awarding grades on your major assignments:

A+ = 98	B+ = 88	C+ = 78	D = 65
A = 95	B = 85	C = 75	F = 50
A- = 92	B- = 82	C- = 72	R = Rewrite*

   *An "R" indicates that the assignment has potential but warrants revisions or rewriting. If you receive an "R," you may rewrite and resubmit the assignment to be reevaluated. Please turn in the original assignment when you turn in the rewritten work no later than a week from when the graded assignment was returned to you.
4. Please follow the submission guidelines below and ensure your essays conform to the usage standards, formatting, and design guidelines for submitting creative works for publication (see MLA guidelines - Appendix A):
   a. Your original essays should be placed in the OWL-Space Resources file designated for each essay (Place in Peer Essay folder so that all can access them). Your critiques of others should be placed only in your individual Drop Box so that only I can see it. You will need a hard copy to give to your peer after we have workshopped their essay.
   b. Your name should be on every page as a footer or header with the page number; use your last name, essay number as the file name.
   c. You should follow MLA documentation formats whenever you use information from others.
5. **Please follow the Rice Honor Code for all work prepared for this course.** Assignments call on your own ideas and experience, but if you bring in information from others, please be careful to acknowledge all sources appropriately. Not doing so would be a violation of academic honesty policies and the Honor Code. Having someone else write your essays or substantially edit your writing is considered a violation of the Honor Code in this class; however, you may have someone read over your essays for clarity and slips in proofreading.

Daily Syllabus – Winter 2015

In the following daily syllabus, you will find the readings and exercises you should have completed before that class meeting. Most nights we will cover craft essays, example essays, and your own writing, with most of our time focused on workshopping peer essays. We will deal with the style review and Bacon as time allows, and I will occasionally discuss some of the highlights from Bacon's text in the chapters assigned

Class	Dates	Topic	Assignment
1	**Jan 7**	Intro and workshop sign-up Defining Creative Nonfiction	Introductions and sign up for nights to workshop your writing. **Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** Chapters 1 – Defining & 2 – Plentiful Permutations; Conroy, "A Yo-Yo Going Down, A Mad Squirrel Coming Up"; Covington, from *Salvation on Sand Mountain*; Kingsolver, "Household Words." **Forché & Gerard** "Becoming the Godfather of Creative Nonfiction" & Williams, "Why I Write" **Keep it Real**: "Private and Public: The Range and Scope of Creative Nonfiction," "Evolution of the Genre," "History into Nonfiction Narrative," & "Scenes" **Bacon:** Skim Chapters 1 & 2
2	**Jan 14**	Memoir and the personal essay	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** Chapters 3 – Form & 4 – Description; Atwood, "A Path Taken, with All the Certainty of Youth"; Moody, From *The Black Veil* **Forché & Gerard:** Lopate, "Writing Personal Essays: On the Necessity of Turning Oneself Into a Character"; Gerard, "Taking Yourself Out of the Story: Narrative Stance and the Upright Pronoun" & "What They Don't Tell You About Hurricanes." **Keep it Real**: "Frame," "Guiding the Reader," "The 'I,'" "The Memoir Craze," "Navel-gazing," "Reconstruction of Events," "The Roots of Memoir," & "The Vagaries of Memory" **OWL-Space:** Hampl, "Memory and Imagination" **Bacon:** Chapter 3 and 4 (Exercises 3C, F, H and 4 G or E) plus essay Gates, "Sin Badly."
3	**Jan 21**	Memoir and personal essay (continues)	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** Chapters 5 – Dialogue, 6 – Style, & 7 – Revision; Silko, "Uncle Tony's Goat"; Lisicky, "New World." **Keep it Real**: "Composite Characters," "Family Members as Characters," "Point of View," "Psychoanalyzing Characters," "Quotation Marks," "Reflection," & "Getting Inside Characters' Heads" **OWL-Space:** Excerpts from *If I die. . . .* **Bacon***:* O'Brien, "On the Rainy River"; Sedaris, "Genetic Engineering"; Tan, "Mother Tongue" and). **Essay #1 due - Start workshop of student essays (ones scheduled for tonight will need to be sent to us by previous Saturday noon).**

Class	Dates	Topic	Assignment
4	**Jan 28**	Research City and Place	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** Chapters 8 – Written Sources & 9 – Interviewing; Bahrampour, "Persia on the Pacific"; Kahn, "Notes from a Parallel Universe." **Forché & Gerard:** Wexler, "Saying Goodbye"; Pearson, "Researching Your Own Life"; Lowry, "The Shadow Knows" **Keep it Real**: "Acknowledgment of Sources," "Backdoor Access," "Compression," "Facts," "Fact-checking," "Forewords and Afterward," "Reflection," & "Getting Inside Characters' Heads" **Bacon:** Chapter 5 (Exercises B & E) & Chapter 6 (no exercises). **Workshop of Essay #1 continues**
5	**Feb 4**	City and Place	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** The City Essay and Place Writing; Orlean, "A Place Called Midland" OWL-Space: White, "Here is New York" & Capote, "New Orleans" and "New York" **Bacon:** Chapter 7 (Exercise H). **Workshop of Essay #1 continues**
6	**Feb 11**	Place and Nature	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** Barnes, "The Ashes of August"; Dillard, "Total Eclipse" **Forché & Gerard:** Moore, "*Ah, Wilderness!* Humans, Hawks, and Environmental Correctness on the Muddy Rio Grande" OWL-Space: Solnitt, "Two Arrowheads" and Bryson, from *A Walk in the Woods* **Bacon:** Chapters 8 (Exercise F) **Essay #2 due – Start workshop of student essays (ones scheduled for tonight will need to be sent to us by previous Saturday noon).**
7	**Feb 18**	Rants and Reviews	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** Duncan, "What Fundamentalists Need for Their Salvation"; Ozick, "What Helen Keller Saw"; Rauch "Caring for Your Introvert." **Forché & Gerard:** Espada, "All Things Censured: The Poem NPR Doesn't Want You to Hear"; Espada, "Prisoner AM-8335: A Postscript" **Keep it Real**: "Influencing Readers" OWL-Space: Oates, "Against Nature." **Workshop of Essay #2 continues**

Class	Dates	Topic	Assignment
8	**Feb 25**	Lyric Essays and Meditations	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** Birkerts, "Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man"; Coleman "The Evil Eye"; Hoagland, "Circus Music." **Keep it Real**: "The Lyric Essay" OWL-Space: Kupperman, Excerpts from *I just Lately Started Buying Wings.* **Bacon**: Chapter 9 (Exercise G or H). **Workshop of Essay #2 continues**
9	**Mar 4**	Literary Journalism	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Bradway & Hesse:** Literary Journalism; Gonzales, "Marion Prison"; Johnson, "Run, Rudolph, Run"; & Mailer, "The Faith of Graffiti." **Forché & Gerard:** Lowry, "Not the Killing but Why"; Merrill, "Every Hell is Different"; Forché, "The 'New' Literature," Merrill, "Sarajevo I," & Forché, "Emergence" **Keep it Real**: "Subjectivity" **Selections of your responses to one to two of the Bradway & Hesse prompts to read to the class and discuss.**
10	**Mar 11**	Publishing and Legal Issues	**Read** the following chapters and essays: **Forché & Gerard:** "Getting Published," "Avoiding Self-Censorship: A guide to the Detection of Legal Land Mines" **Keep it Real**: "Defamation and Libel," "Legal Responsibilities of Publishers," & "Writers' Responsibility to Subjects" Presentation and discussion with Larry Hampton, Houston attorney specializing in intellectual property and other legal issues for writers. **Continue discussion of selections of your responses to one or two of the Bradway & Hesse prompts.**
11	**Mar 18**	Final class	**Portfolios or proposals with sample chapters due. Discussion and reading from portfolio or proposals.** Celebration

Assignments with Due Dates and Values

The table below includes the due date and value for each assignment. See the pages following for specific guidelines on each assignment.

Due Date	Assignments	Value
Jan 21 (17)	Essay # 1 – Memoir or personal essay	15%
Feb 13 (7)	Essay # 2 – Personal, Place, Travel, or Literary Journalism	20%
Mar 4	Assignment #3 – Reading and discussion of Bradway & Hesse prompt responses	5%
Jan 21 – Feb 25	Feedback to peers – in class and turned in night essay workshopped	10%
Mar 18	Portfolio – your essays, rewrites, in-class writing, responses to "Ideas for Writing" in Bradway and Hesse, pp. 134-150, lists of pubs, miscellaneous writing ideas, etc. Or for those retaking the class, turn in your Capstone proposal with sample essays, or a book proposal with table of contents and sample chapters for publication	30%
Throughout the semester	Class participation and attendance; meaningful contributions to discussions	20%

Guidelines for Creative Nonfiction Workshops

The purpose of the workshop is to give and receive constructive, thoughtful, and rigorous feedback about your work from your peers. Critiquing others' writing will help you read more critically, which will also help you improve your own writing. Before the first workshop, please read the "Procedures for Creative Nonfiction Writing Workshops" for the specific rules for this class and Betty Levine's essay "Critique Your Way to Better Writing" for how to get the most out of critiquing others; both are posted in OWL-Space.

For the workshop format to be helpful to you and your classmates, it is essential that you come to class prepared to discuss your peers' work, so please read their work carefully and come with specific feedback on all of the essays scheduled to be discussed.

The two most important guidelines to remember in workshopping are (1) respond to your peers as you would want them to respond to you (be honest, constructive, and respectful), and (2) give specific examples from the work to support each of your major points.

You should use the following questions to guide your feedback for your peers:

1. Does the title draw you in to the piece? Do the first few words and sentences make you want to read more? Does the title capture the theme as you see it? If the title does not work for you, what would you suggest? What changes might the writer make to the introduction to make it more compelling?
2. Do you have a clear sense of the narrator? Is the voice clearly established? Is the point of view consistent? Note any discrepancies between the writer now and the writer then in the story.
3. What is the structure of the piece and does it work? If the narrative arc does not work, how might it be improved?
4. Do the transitions between paragraphs and ideas propel the piece and seem natural and effective?
5. How does the place or setting, language, style, or tone, add to our understanding of the narrator and others in the piece, to the purpose, or to the overall impression you take from the piece?
6. Does the dialogue (if any) ring true? Should there be more? If so, where?
7. Does the narrative contain too much reflection or not enough? Does the writer need to show more and tell less or the other way around? If so, where in particular?
8. Do the facts seem real, true to life? If not, what is missing to create verisimilitude for you?
9. Does the piece end effectively? If so, what works for you? If not, what do you suggest to improve it?
10. Overall, how well does this piece work as a creative nonfiction essay for you personally?

You are not limited to these questions; you may discuss other creative writing topics relevant to the particular essay if you wish.

In addition to writing comments in the margins of workshopped essays for your peers, you should also type an overall critique for the peer essays assigned to you (usually 3 to 4). You will (1) place a copy in your Drop Box for me no later than 2 hours ***before*** class **and** (2) give the typed feedback to your fellow student being workshopped **after** we have discussed his or her essay in class.

We will workshop Essays 1 and 2. You will need to provide copies to your classmates in time for them to read your essay before the class in which it is to be workshopped. Thus, those scheduled on the first workshop night will need to place their essays in the Resource Folder for Essay #1 or Essay #2 by the Saturday AM before the class in which their essay is scheduled to be workshopped; all of the rest of the essays should be in the proper Resource Folder by the due date.

Please remember to place your name on each page along with page numbers, include the word count on the first page, use Times Roman font, allow 1-inch margins, and double space the entire essay (see MLA guidelines in Appendix A).

Essay Assignments and Portfolio

Essay # 1 – Memoir Essay (2 1/2 – 4 pages, ~700 to 1250 words)

For first-time 617 students:

1. Brainstorm scenes from your life, listing as many as come to mind.
2. Circle the top three to five that you would like to develop.
3. Develop one scene into a free-standing memoir essay.

For all others:

1. List topics or titles of the creative nonfiction essays you have already written and the ones you are thinking about writing for your collection to be published or for your Capstone.
2. Select one of these topics and write the essay.

Essay # 2 – Personal, Place, Travel, or Literary Journalism (3 – 5 pages, ~850 to 1500 words)

Use Idea # 9, # 13, # 21, # 27, # 28, # 31, # 36, or # 41, pp. 134-154 from Bradway & Hesse and write an essay foregrounding ideas, place, travel, or an event, or write a Literary Journalism essay on any topic

Please include any description of context needed to frame the essay for us.

Those auditing or working on their Capstone may use one of prompts above or add to their Capstone by writing another essay or chapter or by substantially revising one already written.

Bradway & Hesse Prompts

I have selected the Bradway & Hesse Prompts (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 15, 20, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 33, 51, pp. 134 – 155) based on the types of writing experiences they provide. You are to select eight of these and respond as they suggest and then select one or two to bring to class for all to read and critique on the third to the last day of class. You will need to bring copies for us or post them in the Bradway & Hesse folder in Resources in Owl-Space at least two days before class and plan to read the essay to us and receive feedback from us. Your eight responses, including the one to two you discuss with the class, are to be included in your portfolio (see below). These may range from a page to three pages, double spaced. Please work on these throughout the semester and do not wait until the end to try to do them all.

The Bacon Exercises

Of course, the foundation of any writing is the ability to use language effectively; thus, I have asked you to read and do some of the exercises in the Bacon text. We are only doing a few of the exercises, but I hope you will try your hand at many of them. She provides responses for you and you will find that what you learn from imitating and analyzing other's prose is very helpful in taking your own writing to the next level. You will be including the specified exercises in your portfolios (see below). Please try to do these as assigned to avoid their stacking up at the end.

Portfolio (Electronic or Hard Copy Format)

Your portfolio is a collection of the writing you have done this term. You will probably want to create an e-portfolio, but you may turn in a hard copy if you prefer. I have provided a possible template in OWL-Space if you decide to go digital, but you certainly are not limited to using it. All I ask is that you use Word so that I can easily go into it and add comments. You may also make it a PDF if you want to make sure the formatting is perfect, although that is not as easy for me to add comments or suggestions in the margins as I go through page by page. Any electronic version should be placed in your Drop Box by the last class meeting.

Please include the following in your portfolio:

1. Table of contents and preface which includes context for and any lessons learned from compiling your work into this portfolio.
2. Copies of essays 1 and 2 and their rewritten versions when appropriate.
3. Responses to at least eight of the following from Bradway & Hesse – Ideas for Writing: Numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 15, 20, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 33, and 51. Also, include any other responses to in-class prompts (original and rewritten) if not one of those listed. Please label each so that the prompt you have used is clear.
4. Reponses to assigned Bacon exercises.
5. Annotated bibliography of ten creative non-fiction books you have read recently or would like to read with a brief description of each and a statement on why you have selected them.
6. Your writing bio – who you are as a writer, what and who influenced you, what type of writing you do most, actual publications, and current work.
7. Writing plans – memberships, projects, workshops, Webinars, conferences, retreats, dreams.

Alterative Assignment for Students Doing a Creative Nonfiction Capstone

Draft your preliminary proposal for your Capstone project. In addition, determine what you believe will be the unifying theme for the creative nonfiction essays you listed in the exercise for Essay #1, create your table of contents, and write an introduction to the Capstone. Include at least two of the essays you plan to include in the finished project.

If neither of these options appeals to you, you should discuss other ideas with me. I want to make this assignment as useful as possible, so I am pretty open to any idea that you have.

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Documented Disabilities: Please speak with your instructor if you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class**.** All discussions will remain confidential. Students should also contact the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.

Appendix A - MLA Guidelines

Please follow the *MLA Style Sheet* for your essays in this class. The following are the general guidelines for formatting your papers:

1. Print your essays out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch unlined paper.
2. Double-space the text of your paper.
3. Use 12 point Times New Roman or similar serif font.
4. Leave two spaces after periods and colons.
5. Allow a 1-inch margin on all sides. Use a ragged right margin (in other words, do not use full justification).
6. Indent the first line of paragraphs five spaces. Either use the Tab key or use the paragraph formatting feature.
7. Place your name and the page numbers in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.
8. Use italics for titles of books or free-standing works instead of underlining them.
9. Use bold instead of underlining for headings should you use them.

For references to any sources that you use, please follow the MLA guidelines for parenthetical documentation or notes (foot or end), and for the bibliography.

Most literary journals still follow MLA, but you should always check before submitting your writing for publication since many also use APA and Chicago. For example, *Confluence*, the journal that publishes writing of students in MLS and MLA programs follows Chicago.